

Monday, JANUARY 18, 2010

By now the earthquake event in Haiti is “old news”. The world is growing weary of seeing the pictures, hearing the sad stories. News anchors are returning home, life moves on. Yet for the residents of Port-au-Prince, my boyhood home, life will never be the same. Despair will be an ever present, haunting reality for years to come. Daily, Haitian Christians are living the “Journey” we are considering this week... ‘Discovering God is Real’, and it’s tough. Those Haitians who’ve never “Discovered God” are struggling to find any hope in the debris.

God is not unfamiliar with human tragedy, hopelessness, or despair. Consider Psalm 116:1-9, or Psalm 77:1-15 or Psalm 71 or 139. What is God saying to people around the world who are living in desperation? What is He saying to you and me?

Last week we discussed the following attributes of God: GOOD / GLORIOUS; ORIGIN / OMNI; DESIGN / DEPENDABLE. Have you noticed those very same declarations seem different this week? Indescribable tragedy has struck and we naturally find ourselves re-evaluating statements which seemed easy to make days ago. This week we’re supposed to make equally grandiose statements with confidence as we lay the next brick of truth... “Discovering God is REAL”. So where do we begin? Hard questions, fair questions loom before us... “Is God aware, does God understand, does God care about Haiti, my family and my life?” How do you answer?

In many ways Exodus 3 occurs in a very similar environment. It had been nearly 400 years since Jacob and his family moved from the land God had given them (Canaan) to Egypt during famine (Gen. 47). The ‘good life’ had turned to slavery...centuries of slavery. Despair was all the Hebrew people had known for generations, with no end in sight. While they held to the “stories” of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph...hopelessness was their daily reality.

In the darkness of hopelessness, God took the initiative, arranging a ‘rendez-vous’ of the burning bush miracle for Moses. God did the same in Bethlehem (John 1:1-5,9-14). Moses realized he was having an encounter with God, Bethlehem didn’t. When, where, what was your last “encounter” with God?

Tuesday, JANUARY 19, 2010

Yesterday my closing question may have left you feeling uncomfortable. Is an “encounter with God” a reality? May I give you several Biblical examples?

- Jacob had a powerful dream which left him so convinced he’d had an encounter with God he set up a stone pillar and returned with his entire family 20 years later! (Gen. 28:10-22 and Gen. 35:1-15.)
- Joshua was so convinced of his “encounter” (Joshua 5:13-15) that he led the people in a daily march around Jericho to capture it!
- A starving widow in Zarephath had a daily, non-verbal encounter with God as He kept her oil and flour supplied for a long time, enabling her to make just enough food to keep herself, son and Elijah alive in famine for many months. (1 Kings 17:7-16)
- Isaiah had an encounter in the Temple while worshipping in his grief over the death of a friend (Is. 6:1-8) and it propelled him to a lifetime as a prophet, a spokesman for God.
- Nehemiah evidently had an encounter in fasting and prayer in deep grief over the news of Jerusalem in ruins. Convinced God was calling him to lead a rebuilding project, he faced the king. (Neh. 1-2:6)

In each case the person seemed confident God was interacting specifically with them in a deeply personal and miraculous way, inviting them to see His holiness and His compassionate care for them in their pain. In each case they felt God understood their situation and was giving instructions unique to that situation. To the degree they were obedient, God honored their obedience and sustained them, guided them, protected them in their “journey”. Do you see the pattern?

Wednesday, JANUARY 20, 2010

As life gets complex and painful, have you noticed we tend to isolate ourselves from those who care about us most...especially God. In our isolation, do you find we distort? We distort the truth, the reality, even the severity of the situation. Our distorted perceptions lead us to wrong conclusions, then wrong reasoning and often unwise decisions and action plans! Often, even in the early stages of this downward spiral, we conclude God has abandoned us.

Read again Exodus 2:23-4:17. Try to understand Moses’ emotions and his thinking. Why do you think Moses was having such a hard time accepting God’s invitation, even though he was seeing a bush on fire that wasn’t being consumed / he was hearing a voice speaking in his own language, addressing him by name / he had taken off his sandals, as instructed, sensing the awesome presence of God /he watched his staff turn to a snake, his hand turn leprous and both turn back to normal again!! Yet over and over he backed away from God...why?

As far as we know Moses had never encountered God before. He had no “Bible”, no church, no pastor, nothing but the stories about God handed down through generations and his father-in-law who evidently was a man who worshipped God. Like young David many years later, Moses spent endless weeks watching sheep out in the open fields. During those times it appears his mind was contemplating the bigger questions of life, and his heart wrestled with the emotions of his ancestry, his palace years, the cruelty of slavery, the hopelessness of bondage. He knew the ferocious might of Egypt’s enslavement. It would require more than old stories to free 2 million Hebrew slaves!

I wonder if Moses, like David (1 Samuel 17:33-37), had gained a perspective of the reality of God’s magnificence, and the dark hopelessness of the reality of Egyptian slavery began to fade in the growing light of God’s majesty? How does that happen?

When the sun sets these days in Haiti, it gets dark... electricity is rare. The night sky is brilliant with stars and moon which have been there all along, but in a new way proclaim the majesty and sustaining power of the Creator (Ps. 19:1-4; Col. 1:16,17) in the midst of rubble. Is hope awakening? (Is. 40)

Thursday, JANUARY 21, 2010

Many of the homeless and injured in Haiti are fine Christian people who have trusted the Bible to be true, been faithful in church involvement, sought to live their lives in God honoring ways...and now what little they had is gone, in some cases including family members. Can you imagine the questions these dear Christians have?

When Moses returned to Egypt, he met first with the Elders (leaders) of the Hebrew slaves (Ex. 4:29-31). Notice their response!

Encouraged, Moses next went to see Pharaoh (Ex. 5:1-18). What do you see in his response?

Confused, angry, frustrated...the Hebrew leaders came back to Moses (Ex. 5:19-21) and broken hearted, Moses went back to meet with God, deeply disappointed (Ex. 5:22,23).

What do you suppose missionaries, Haitian pastors, church leaders all across Haiti are feeling now, 10 days after the disaster? Read carefully Exodus 6:1-12, 28-8:19. Over the weeks of these "confrontations" with Pharaoh and his magicians, can you imagine the feelings of insecurity, failure, disappointment, maybe even shame, growing in Moses as his "power demonstrations" are mocked and mimicked? What kept him going back only to be ridiculed?

Do you remember the contrast I painted between Psalm 14:1 "the fool says in his heart there is no God.", and Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in time of trouble."? Moses found himself in between those two extremes, and thousands of my Haitian friends are living there today. What kept Moses going back? What keeps the Haitian Christians hopeful? The certainty that God is Real, and fully aware. That God is just as much Sovereign God today as He was before the disaster. God has never promised us abundance or ease in life. He has promised us His Presence (John 14:16-18). We live in a fallen, sinful world where a huge war is raging for the souls of every person...and our enemy, Satan, hates us. Paul wrote "I have learned the secret of being content in each and every circumstance, whether well fed or hungry...I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:12,13) Is God's Presence enough for you?

Friday, JANUARY 22, 2010

This week we've been looking at Moses' experience with 'Discovering God is Real' as he returned to Egypt to face the Pharaoh who had expelled him, and confront that Pharaoh with demands of releasing his 2 million Hebrew slave population work force! If you haven't lately read the story of God's power demonstrated in the plagues, it's remarkable! (Exodus 8-12). Penniless slaves walking free out of Egypt, after generations of bondage to the most powerful enslaving nation on the planet! (Ex. 12:31-36) It's only possible because God is Real!

It's important to remember God's overall purpose in delivering the slaves was not their freedom from slavery, it was so God's magnificence which would be evident to all nations through their deliverance (Ex. 9:16)! Also, it was God's deep desire that the Hebrews hear and respond to His invitation to live as a people of God in a loving relationship with God (Ex. 6:6,7). Their deliverance wasn't only about relief from slavery for that generation...it was to be a story told from generation to generation so even now, 3500 years later, people in hopeless situations can find hope...God hasn't changed (Malachi 3:6)!

Earthquakes have aftershocks...and hundreds have rumbled Haiti since last week. Where does hope come from when the crisis has passed, but the long tunnel of despair is before you? Haiti's despair will be a constant, suffocating reality for a long, long time. For Moses and the slaves, the euphoria of freedom soon gave way to the terror of Pharaoh's pursuing army. Exodus 13:17-14:31. That great "Red Sea" deliverance was again God's assurance that He had not abandoned His people nor would He be deterred from bringing them to the mountain where Moses and He first encountered, for God's initial promise was that He would bring them to worship Him there (Ex. 3:12).

In closing today, consider Miriam's song of celebration in response to their deliverance (Exodus 15) and compare it to Mary's song of celebration (Luke 1:24-55). Amazingly similar! Yet both songs would be followed by years of very difficult living, sometimes day to day frightful existence. But in the midst of the long dark days...the confidence God is Real!!



Pastor Doug Anderson

JANUARY 18 - 22, 2010

Discovering God is Real



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